

EDUCATING FOR A SANE SOCIETY
Centre For Learning, December 18-22, 2006

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THE OPEN LIBRARY

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»THE OPEN LIBRARY«

At Centre for Learning, we have an open library both in concept and reality. This means that there is free and open access to all material and resources, at all times of day and night, and throughout the year. Mutual trust and shared responsibility provide the ground from which this library functions. The rules and conventions of library interaction evolve out of a sense of co-operation, consideration and care for the community as a whole.

The challenge for the librarian is not one of policing and monitoring, but to perceive and hold the library and its users as a vibrant functioning whole. This can only be done when the community of users feels a sense of ownership and accountability. For example, on an afternoon when there is a sudden deluge of rain, a couple of students dash to the library to shut windows and move books out of reach of the rain. At night, the place is locked by individual senior students on a rota basis. If one of them is unwell or away, another student takes on that job. Much of this happens without the intervention or knowledge of the librarian.

The collection in this library reflects the commitment to quality and excellence. Classics both traditional and contemporary can be found on the shelves. Staff and students are actively involved in the selection process. In fact, students are taken regularly to book stores and book exhibitions to select and buy books for the library. An innovative in-house computer program ensures that all users can borrow, return, search for, reserve, and conduct other library operations with ease. The facility of borrowing has been extended to former students, parents and guests.

The main library is located in a beautiful building which was designed with ideas from staff, students and, of course, the architects. Its ambience and aesthetics welcomes and invites all users and visitors. Every student group has a weekly library period which is used for browsing, borrowing, returning and also for various activities to enhance reading and awareness of the library. Helping the library in various ways is an inherent culture of the place. Books in need of repair are restored imaginatively and lovingly by students.

They also do projects to facilitate use of the library by creating bibliographies, making indexes and labels for shelves, posters and book marks, putting together a short video on the library and a brief computer guide for newcomers.

The open library at CFL is a happy and lively place.

~~~~~THE SPIRIT OF THE OPEN LIBRARY~~~~~

How does it come alive in each and every facet of the school library?

Lets find out! Remember that the openness of the library cannot happen if you are a speed fiend! Space and leisure are essential to the spirit and fulfillment of an open library.

1. LOCATION: Even if you are already in a fixed location, read on for future reference.

The library needs to be in a central place, open and easily accessible to all users. Should it be close to the classrooms? Ask teachers and students what they feel. Not near the kitchen, the street or even the playgrounds for fear of noise, pollution, heat and smoke. Upstairs, downstairs or in the principal's chamber? Again, users' feedback will be valuable.

2. PHYSICAL APPEARANCE: Inviting, welcoming, bright, colourful. Remember, this is a library being used mainly by young people. In fact, they can help bring in each of these aspects.

A wide entrance so your users don't feel cramped as they enter. Even if your area is small, try to provide different spaces for different activities. Have furniture or not(!) in tune with the area. For example, relaxing seats and cushions for the informal reading area, table and chairs for reference area, mats for story time and other group activities, little nooks and corners for individual readers, low chairs near shelves for browsing, stone benches for outside reading, a pick-a-book box for anyone to read in the library and so on.

Children will happily make posters listing various aspects of the library. They share their writings, sketches, projects, craft work, flower arrangements and calendars through displays. Notice boards are also not the librarian's prerogative but a joint responsibility. So teachers and students bring in interesting clippings, announcements of exhibitions, pictures and photographs, jokes and cartoons for the librarian to arrange on the notice board. Younger children appreciate it if their material is at their eye level.

There are also 'talking points' A peace flag from Italy, some stones from Lothal, a scrap book of a Mela, assorted things made by Arvind Gupta when he visited.... Each of these has some significance for the children and they can talk about it to visitors or new entrants.



3. SELECTION AND COLLECTION: It is best that the librarian is on the selection committee, if she is not there already! This is obviously because she is the one who knows the collection, the users and their profiles.

Decide on a budget looking at previous years' patterns, present needs and future growth. Keep abreast of new material by reading reviews in newspapers and journals and put them up so users also learn to make intelligent suggestions.

Visit bookstores on a regular basis. Visit other libraries when possible, for other ideas. Make sure you have material in more than one language. Also try to have some books in Braille. How about some archival material? Try to acquire some. Keep audio and video tapes, CDs and DVDs as well as CDROMs. This way you will be making your users aware of different methods of accessing information.

Now here is where your users actively enter the scene. Invite suggestions from them by having a box, or by having a wish-list notebook prominently in view. Look at it frequently and give your users some feedback. Take groups of students to bookstores and book fairs for selection and purchase. (See further sections for more details)

4. ORGANISATION AND ACCESS: This is where the proof of the pudding comes in! Is the library locked when the librarian is not there? Even if this sounds revolutionary, just let it vibrate in your ears....how about keeping the place open with senior students in charge of locking and unlocking each day?!! You CAN do this when the basic philosophy of the school is one of freedom with responsibility. The library is then in harmony with the school's intentions. Clear conventions based on co-operation, convenience and common-sense appeal to children and they do adhere to them. For example, NOTHING leaves the library without a record of its leaving! If books are missing or lost, there is a notebook for users to fill in the details. This makes the loss a very factual occurrence with no overtones of theft and suspicion attached. Others also enter the picture to remind and search for the books. For me, a book is never lost. It surfaces after three months, sometimes even six months. There are no fines for late return, so frequent reminders are made, generally and individually. By and large, forgetfulness is not a major issue. As the librarian, you must also remember to be talking and relating to your users in various ways which is the basis of all that we do at CFL.

Are your bookshelves unlocked and easily accessible? I hope you do not have very high shelves! They have an unfortunate resemblance to walls. In any case, make sure you put books for younger children within their reach. Do students freely move around, browse, do reference and read in the library?

Organisation of your material goes a long way in making your users independent. The Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme, though not very satisfactory, still gives a broad framework within which local variations can be used. It is also the

most commonly used at other libraries so your young users will be at ease whichever library they visit.

Colored strips to code different categories are very helpful. Students who replace books find this invaluable.

Finally, if you have not yet computerized your collection, start thinking about it FAST! The benefits are enormous and much easier for the librarian to monitor use and nurture openness. We have a program that was created for us by an old student. It is friendly to users from age 6 to 60! One of the many customized features is that you can reserve a book borrowed by someone, and a message is flashed to that user to please return the book soon since it is needed by such and such a person. This is a very unusual way of functioning because it puts the onus on being co-operative on the individual, and not on any system!!! You too can look at any of your alumni who can contribute a software package.

Maintenance and care are an integral part of the library. Do you get nightmares worrying about this? Do create the option of getting student helpers. In CFL, students do community work every morning and one of their jobs in the library is to replace returned books to the right locations. Also there is a group which takes up creative repair work of damaged books. Sometimes we use a library period to do this and other related book care activities. We find students take it up happily and not as a chore. Later, we display these books. One last word. In India we are usually very remiss about providing wheelchair access. Can you please push for that if you do not already have it? I am sure the management will be happy to have you alert them on this aspect

5. USE: Use comes about as a natural outcome of all the aspects we have mentioned earlier. Other ideas that have worked are

1. A separate shelf for books of non-fiction for seniors and juniors. These consist of books from the subject shelves that are of general interest but do not get read often. This collection is changed every now and then and has worked well.
2. A half-way-home shelf for new books AFTER they have come off the new books display and BEFORE they get hidden and forgotten in their subject shelves. We plan to keep them in this shelf for one term.
3. As part of projects, children have created books of different kinds. We have a special shelf for them called In-house publications!
4. Adopt-a-book. Children are encouraged to adopt a book or author. This means they must now and then check on the condition of the books, make sure they are being read and cared for!
5. Story telling or reading out from a book gives a great impetus to reading.

Besides all these, you can have activities, games, projects, visits of authors, debates and many other ideas to enhance use. (We will go into these in more detail in the next workshop.)

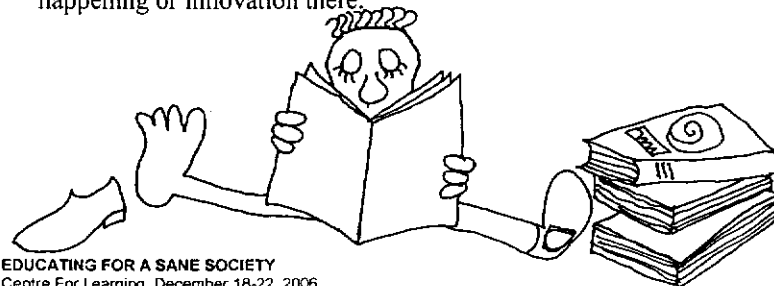
I am not sure where this comes in but I have found it very interesting to share with the children, accounts of other libraries and their practices. One favourite story is that in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, every user when asked, must recite an oath in Latin which essentially says they will not damage the books by exposing them to fire, water, food and bad handling! Another is how libraries try to conserve space by having shelves tightly placed against one another. When the user wishes to browse in a particular shelf, he pushes a button and the shelves slide back giving the space. They always ask what would happen if two people pushed buttons for different shelves! I never found out.

6. HUMAN RESOURCE: This is the most valuable resource the library can have. To have a library that is alive depends on the human being caring for it. Open access is the call you as the librarian MUST make. To take the suggestions given above and to convert and adapt them to your situation is again your privilege! Try to win over teachers and management by showing how involved and energetic you are.

Above all, I hope you enjoy what you are doing because believe me it's a wonderful life!

Here are some things that are OK though they may be No-No in most libraries!

1. Use of library for other events is good provided it does not dislocate the collection too much and is held at a time when there are no other users. Different people are likely to come in to the library and discover things!
2. No need for deathly silence or hushed whispers in a school library. A low buzz of interactive discussion or sharing is fine.
3. Rules are not always sacrosanct. They can be reviewed by the librarian and the user on a discretionary basis.
4. Should the librarian be quiet and passive? Not at all! The library is on show, not the librarian, so every opportunity can be taken to highlight or project any happening or innovation there.



BRINGING YOUNG PEOPLE AND BOOKS TOGETHER

Young people, like many of us adults, have become more and more dependent on the media, internet and computer driven software for information as well as for entertainment. With the dazzling advances in technology and the fascinating diversity of the media, it is little wonder that a young person's fancy turns more readily to them rather than to books. As educators and librarians, what is our response? The first thing is to recognize and acknowledge the benefits of each of these modes of learning. From there we can make out a case where books are still valued for their unique contribution and happily co-exist with all other forms which provide information, inspiration and entertainment.

When a child reads, there is a relationship which begins between her and the book. It is an enduring relationship, where the reader has the leisure to explore the written word at her own pace, with breaks, at any location, and what is important for a child, in any position! Young children are drawn to stories and are full of curiosity and wonder. Usually this moves naturally into a love of reading. But we may uncaringly or unwittingly dam this natural surge. Very little encouragement to read, hardly any exposure to excellent books, both in the home and school environment, too many other occupations, unmonitored TV-viewing, addiction to computer games, and even too much academic pressure can dry up the imaginative flow. Descartes, the French mathematician and philosopher said, "The reading of all good books is like conversation with the finest minds of past centuries." This is the personal and direct contact we can make through something as simple as reading!

Written language has an enduring quality that cannot easily be replaced. Reading raises questions, sparks off ideas and starts a chain of imaginative thought. By the simple act of reading, young people are expanding and enhancing their sensibilities. They are responding to strong themes, to evocative language and are being exposed to issues they cannot afford to ignore. They are able to get in touch with their own emotions, fears and joys. In reading, they are also learning to read between the lines, pick up nuances and complexities, which the author has embedded in her writing. They are picking up the skill to be critical of content and form – to discern when there is insincerity or condescension. Reading also stretches the vocabulary of youngsters from age 6 upwards to age 20, and helps in making their writing more expressive. After a period of reading regularly, the reader is able to discern between fact and opinion so there is a growth of a thinking individual.

Encouraging children to read both fiction and non-fiction from a young age enables them to grapple with concepts, ideas and processes. These inputs will help them to make sense of the world as they grow up, and also build stamina to read works of nonfiction later in life.

Now, I would like to move on to the essentials that will allow all of the above to happen. But first, think back to your own childhood. What made you read or not read? Both can help you learn about children's patterns. I feel an equal surge of satisfaction to get a non-reader reading as well as help a good reader deepen his reading.

Please use the following questions that I have posed as a check list for yourselves.

Environment ◀◀

1. *Have you provided the right environment for reading in your library?*

Make sure that your library has an inviting, bright and colourful appearance. This can be done with the help of posters, sketches and soft boards which your young users contribute to.

2. *Is the collection interesting, up-to-date and relevant to your young users?*

Try to keep abreast of new books by reading book reviews, visiting bookstores and book fairs.

Keep a notebook or box for students' suggestions and take time to read them. Take the suggestions seriously

Take students along to select books from bookshops.

3. *Have you provided comfortable and attractive reading spaces in your library?*

Have different kinds of seating for different kinds of reading, reference books, computer access, journals and magazines and for browsing through the shelves.. Try to provide little nooks and corners. Children love to read in such spaces.

4. *Are you, as an integral part of the environment, friendly and approachable?*

There are many instances of great people who remember their school and college librarians with deep respect and affection. Can you qualify for that?!

Exposure ◀◀

By exposing a child to what is in itself excellent, you can be sure that he will develop standards of his own.

1. *So can you set some standards of excellence for the books in your library?*

Make sure that when you buy books and subscribe to journals, you take advice from teachers, management, other leading libraries and reviews. Display new

books, if possible along with any information about the author. Use assemblies for highlighting any special books or new journals by asking a teacher or parent who has read it, to say a few words about it. Sometimes an older student can be asked too. Older students are great role models!

2. *Do you believe in the value of browsing and do you actively give time for that?*

Something wonderful called serendipity happens then.

3. *Do you subscribe to a good collection of journals?*

Many college students only have time to do 'short reads' so your journals will ensure that the reading habit is kept alive for them.

4. *Try to take your students on visits to other libraries.* This a great learning experience for the librarian and the children.

Ease of access

This covers both availability of good material at bookshops and accessibility to the users in your library

1. *Do you have open access at your library?*

PI.EASE! Don't lock up your shelves or keep books in metal closed cupboards. Books need to be seen, touched, smelt, browsed through and read. If you are worried about mishandling, theft, defacing, talk to the young people directly. They will respect you for that and the few who may be misusing the library, will get monitored by the others.

2. *Do you have simple methods of borrowing and returning?*

This is vital. Computerise and make life simpler. Bring about trust by asking users to monitor themselves. Talk, talk, talk to them, not lecture!!

3. *Are you aware that the publishing scene has never been more vibrant?*

Bookstores are overflowing with new books, secondhand book stores too are growing. So people are reading. As librarians we need to get in on this act.

Encouragement

1. *Do you or does the school tend to underestimate the value of reading and put it in opposition to study?*

I am sure this does not happen, but we need to be alert to this possibility. As we have said earlier, it is the foundation of all learning, and enlightened managements are already aware of this. You as the librarian need to take a lead in this movement. Highlight award winning books and authors. The human being behind the book is important. Make them aware of this person. Many times

children ask me, "Aunty, have you read all the books in the library?" Of course I haven't, but I know something about them all so I give that impression!

2. *Do you relate with non-readers equally well?*

If you do, unexpected events also help in bringing them into the world of books and reading.

3. *Do you think parents need to be helped to realise the value of reading and also to monitor their childrens' use of computers and television?*

If yes, please invite them to your library, encourage them to borrow and read for themselves and to read out to their children. Share with them your inputs on the joys and value of reading. Ask them to give books as birthday presents or as special treats. Tell them about second hand bookshops they can take their children to.

Enhancement and Enrichment

1. *Do you have a weekly library period with each class?*

If not, please ask for it. For college librarians, can you think of ways to attract users to your library? Have poetry reading and play reading sessions. Help them to form reading groups. Organise mini events like talks by people in your institution who have interests like astronomy or photography or trekking. Ask them to pull out relevant material in your library and display these. The momentum will pick up.

2. *If you have it, do you do any activities which enhance awareness and interest in reading?*

At all ages, as children grow into young adults, their burgeoning minds need guidance and nurturing to deepen their reading. So we as librarians and teachers must be able and ready to provide this enrichment to their reading.

There are a number of activities that you could do, ranging from care of the library and the books, to discussions and debates on books. (Please see further sections for ideas.)

See if you can set up your students to go once a week and read to blind children or to old people or at an orphanage. Doing this will make them aware how privileged they are to have access to books and reading.

Finally, a young person who has read widely grows into a well-rounded adult. In social and professional interaction, she can hold her own. She is quick to pick up nuances, allusions, quotations and references. We owe it to our young people to actively bring them into a lifelong contact with the best in books and reading.

Bertrand Russell said, "There are two motives for reading a book: one that you enjoy it, the other that you can boast about it."

» ENHANCING THE READING HABIT «

Some ideas that have worked:

1. Weekly displays of: New books. Old books that have been untouched on the shelves. Thematic. Based on topical interests. Suggestions for a possible project.
2. Taking students to bookstores (especially second hand ones) and book fairs for help in selection. (See next section)
3. Telling and reading out stories from books in the library. (See further section)
4. Ask children to select a story to enact as a play. Some of them can write the script.
5. Encourage children to read out poems and small stories in the Assembly or on other occasions. They will then come to the library to browse for suitable material.
6. Actively promote and give time for browsing. The wonders of serendipity take place then.
7. Have regular book talks. (See further section)
8. Have journal talks as well. (See further section)
9. Once in a while have book auctions. (See further section)
10. Let children make attractive book jackets for books. This can include a cover design, information on author, plot, and reviews on back cover, inside cover etc.
11. Have children write letters to their favourite authors. Sometimes the authors are gracious enough to reply and even send a complimentary book!
12. Show the film of the book after the majority of the class have read it. This acts as an incentive. Or read out a few chapters one week and show that segment the next week.
13. Have children make book marks, posters, badges and signs, as well as enact book ads.
14. Children can also do projects which further their reading, as well as of others. For e.g. Produce books which go into the library collection.
15. Create questionnaires to assess reading interests.
16. Create bibliographies under different themes, which help other children when they want to select a book to read.

17. Make a film of the library.
18. Interview students and teachers to ascertain reading patterns, age wise, class wise etc.
19. Have treasure hunts in the library. Clues lead from book to book, from section to section in a random way. First the librarian can set this, then the students can do it for the librarian or for another class. Both ways, an informal discovery of the collection is taking place.
20. Have quizzes of a different kind where the answer is given and they have to provide the question. Dumb charades works well for younger groups. For older students a good game is Just-a-minute-in-the-library.
21. Mini seminar presentations by older students on a subject entirely of their choice. They display books they used when preparing, so different areas open up for all the users.
22. Have a book board which children maintain, with their own book reviews, illustrations of characters from a favourite book, a list of their suggestions, book-of-the-week which is a student's choice or a teacher's selection. Put up clippings from newspapers and magazines of book reviews.
23. On your notice board, you can display news of award winners for books, any biographical articles. Display books you have of that author at the same time. For fun, you might also put up cartoons and jokes relating to books. They are always greatly appreciated
24. Adopt-a-book. (Idea taken from the British Library, London!) Have a notebook where children can enter the name of the book they wish to adopt. Their responsibility then is to check on the book from time to time. See if it looks cared for. Make sure it is getting read and loved by others too! The implications are apparent.
25. Invite authors and book lovers to visit the school and talk to the students **in the library.**
26. Send books home to be read by them and ALSO to be read out to them - by grandparent, siblings and parents. Inculcate home involvement.
27. In the same vein, ask parents to read book reviews for children, take children to book releases, give books as birthday gifts, encourage their children to donate their old books to other less endowed schools, or to visit an orphanage, or a school for the blind, and read out to the children there. It is good for them to see how valued a book is and how eager many children are to get access to reading material.
28. Encourage the children to visit second hand bookshops, and also to pause and browse through pavement book sellers, books in carts etc. They learn to appreciate lucky finds and spend much less money.

TAKING STUDENTS TO BOOK STORES AND BOOK FAIRS

At CFL we have found this an extremely valuable exercise and so we share with you some suggestions based on our experience and observations.

Why? This is a very vital part of the involvement of your users in the selection process and helps them to feel responsible and accountable for the collection. They learn about authors, illustrators, publishers and bookshops of different kinds. Don't forget to check out second hand stores or sales. You can save money and get more for your budget!

How is it to be done? In a year, plan to take at least three groups on such expeditions! These could be three individual classes, or volunteers ranging over the three classes.

Ideal group size: 20 to 25. If there are teachers present, this number could go up to 30.

Time needed at the store or fair: At least 2 to 3 hours.

What are the key elements in this exercise?

BEFORE

First, make a preliminary trip to the place to be visited. The reason is that it helps for you to be familiar with the layout and collection. You can also alert the store that you will bring in children and reassure them that you will be responsible for them. All the book stores are very open to this idea.

Second, have a budget and theme or age group in mind for each visit.

Third, have a brief meeting with the group where you can bring up the following points:

1. You, the students, are vital because you know which books we have and can avoid repeats.
2. You know best what is interesting and enjoyable for your peers and juniors.
3. Please be aware that you are buying for the school library and not just for yourselves. So you must have a wider vision. Anything you select will have to be suitable for another 20 or 30 users.
4. Suitability of content, value for price, currency of material, are aspects that you are imbuing constantly in your interaction with the library.
5. Browsing first is essential before selecting.
6. Try to think for yourself and not get too influenced by your friends. We need a variety and range of material!

DURING

You have all gone together from school or met outside the store or fair. Have a quick round up of points made earlier by asking the students to recollect them.

Let's go in!

Allow them to browse for 45 minutes at least and only then start gathering possible books.

Pile all books in a corner of the store. (Store assistants are quite intrigued by this and are co-operative!)

Meanwhile you and other teachers, if present, can walk around making sure everyone is involved.

Then call everyone to the corner and the real exercise begins!

Show each book, ask the person who has selected it to say why quickly. Then decide TOGETHER whether it goes into the Yes, No or Maybe stack. This may take another 45 minutes.

Then ask for a calculator and let a volunteer total the cost. If it is less than the budget, go through the Maybe lot again.

Now you should have a collection matching the planned expenditure.

Inform the assistant that you are done and apologise for any bother.

Some students can oversee the billing and the payment.

After this let each student select any book he or she will introduce to the school and take it home for perusal.

If the school can afford it, you can treat the children to an MTR ice cream cone as a treat!

AFTER

In the next week whenever possible, at the school assembly, try to have a presentation of the books bought, with individual children showing books they selected and saying why they did so.

Display the books in the library for a week.

While accessing the books, enter name of student who selected the book. This is archival information and is very interesting and revealing after a few years.

BENEFITS

Students are exposed to the rationale behind selection and all the issues involved. They learn how to discern quality. They feel responsible for the collection and its use. As adults we also learn how to listen to the users and sense their inclinations. Overall it is an enormous help having so many pairs of eyes to spot good books. Once the books are in the library, the children who made the selections are promoters of the books to other users so the whole dissemination process is distributed!

Note : At Book Fairs, we divide ourselves into three groups for language books, age level or non-fiction and go our own ways. This of course needs one adult or older student to be with each group. Incidentally, since we have done this for so many years, our older students are more than capable to handle a group of younger students.

Variations I have tried : <<<

Groups of students who have read everything in the library and are hungering for more.

Students who hardly read!

Visit to second hand book shops

Groups looking for children's books with excellent illustrations

An art and craft group

Sports interested group.....and any other group you find!!

Hope this is helpful and you try it out!



» STORY TELLING AND STORY READING «

From the days of the Arabian Nights and Scheherazade, story telling has enchanted children and adults of all ages. So as a librarian, you have this unique opportunity to convey some of the resources of the library in story form to your eager listeners.

For ages 6 to 10, stories can be told or read out depending on your comfort level. For older students, a continuing story or novel can be read out each week. Sometimes, the students and I have shared the reading, which is a nice variation. If I can access a film version of the book, this is shown at the end, followed by a discussion on the film version vis a vis the book.

Some stories enjoyed by ages 6 to 10.

1. Pinocchio by Carlo Collodi
2. Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll
3. The Laura Ingalls Wilder series (about the young Laura)
4. Black Beauty
5. Who will be Ningthou? By Indira Ghosh
6. Bishnu the Dhobi Singer by Subhadra Sengupta
7. The Emperor's Nightingale by Hans Christian Andersen
8. The Little Fir Tree by Hans Christian Andersen
9. Ancient Bird legends of India compiled by Shanta Rameshwar Rao
10. Arabian Nights

Some books and stories enjoyed by ages 11 to 14.

1. Watership Down by Richard Adams
2. The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien
3. Swami and Friends by R.K. Narayan
4. Mahabharata for Children by Shanta Rameshwar Rao
5. The Iliad and the Odyssey by Homer. (A simplified translation will be ideal)
6. How much land does a man require? Short story by Leo Tolstoy
7. The Man who planted Trees by Jean Giono
8. Any good science fiction stories by Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke etc.
9. Stories by Jim Corbett
10. Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain

Some books and novels enjoyed by ages 14 and above.

1. Great Expectations by Charles Dickens
2. Three men in a boat by Jerome K. Jerome
3. Father Brown stories by G.K. Chesterton
4. Translations of classic stories by Premchand, Masti Venkatesh Iyengar, Kalki, Rabindranath Tagore etc.
5. The Periodic Table by Primo Levi
6. Short stories by Guy de Maupassant
7. Short stories by Saki
8. Any good biography
9. King Solomon's ring by Konrad Lorentz
10. Surely you're joking, Mr. Feynmann

BENEFITS: First of all, the children learn the art of listening! They also become very discerning readers of style, content and illustration as they grow. Many stories have hidden values and principles. Important issues are highlighted and can be absorbed by children and young people. Stories stir the imagination and evoke empathy. Many themes challenge the students' conditioning. Lastly, story telling can be a bonding time between the adult and the child.

A few important tips:

Try to select a book or story slightly above the reading level of your listeners. This way, you will always be stretching them and encouraging them to read at a more challenging level.

Also, try to select books that don't seem to be picked up and read too readily. Then you are able to bring such books to a larger audience.

Finally, everyone loves to listen to stories. So don't feel inhibited or hesitant about telling or reading out a story. You will soon find that you have an uncritical audience who are absorbed in the story, not in you!



BOOK TALKS

A book talk is a presentation of a book by one student to others in the class. In a period of 45 minutes, two children can talk about a book they have read recently. This activity can be done over one term in the academic year for each class or for selected classes.

PREPARATION

1. Introduce this idea and show them how it works by doing a book talk yourself or having an older student do one, of a story that they all know well, like "The three little pigs" or Akbar and Birbal.
2. Explain the format to them or have it written on a large sheet and keep it on display.
3. Make the plan for the sequence of 'talkers' and enter it on the calendar for convenience.
4. Give them some tips on how to organize and prepare the presentation.
5. Help them with their selection of book if they wish.

PRESENTATION

Each student talks about :

1. The title of the book. Is it part of a series? If so what are the other titles?
2. The author/s along with any information about them. This is more in-depth as the student gets older
3. The illustrator/s. Recognition of other books illustrated by them
4. Kind of book or story. (Adventure, mystery, fantasy, wildlife, science fiction, humour, human interest, etc)
5. A brief outline of the story (not a narration of the story), making sure the end is not given away.
6. Style of writing. Conversational, descriptive, first person etc.
7. Main characters and which, if any, they identified with and why.
8. Reading out of one or two short excerpts.
9. Their personal response and why.
10. Suggested readership level and interest.
11. What made them borrow the book. Did anyone suggest it?
12. Any other interesting features they noticed.

DISCUSSION

This is a vital part of the book talk. Time is given for questions from the listeners. The librarian must guide this discussion unobtrusively! Each listener must be urged to ask a question. I have found that amazing aspects and subtleties are brought out in this session. It is also possible to touch upon delicate issues of gender bias, discrimination, sexuality, disabilities, prejudice etc in a very natural way when the book has these elements. Therefore the importance of having well-written books for children and young people in your library! Some books which have engendered very good discussions are: The Harry Potter series, Journey to Jo'burg, To Kill a Mockingbird, books by Judy Blume and many others. (Check out our library collection for some of these titles.)

OUTCOME

Children have the incentive to read, appraise the book in many different ways, plan how to present, organize their talk in point form, speak coherently, read out clearly, listen and comprehend, ask searching questions and finally, to be participative in the discussions. Also, the listeners often get attracted to borrow a book based on the presentation.

A word at the end:

Reading unusual and well-written books helps improve a child's vocabulary, spelling and comprehension. It also gives her a much wider perspective of people and issues as well as a critical appreciation of content. Books with stereo-typed plots and characters rarely provide the child with any stamina or discernment of good writing. So as librarians and parents, let us get educated about the range of reading available for young people.

Thank you

Useful references:

1. Article on "Children and Reading" in the Journal of the Krishnamurti Schools, 2006
2. Book Lists given along with hand outs.
3. Some book reviews written by students in the Journal of the Krishnamurti Schools.



BOOK AUCTION

This activity is meant to generate a level of excitement for books and uses the mode of an auction to do so! There is no money transaction involved nor do the students actually "buy" any books. They bid to borrow them. Here is how it works.

One set of children extols the virtues of books they have read and enjoyed, to a younger group or to a set of their own class. They do this in the style of an auctioneer. The "bidders" have a set of 20 units of leaves, pebbles, shells, marbles..... which they make or collect, and use that to bid with. One of the children can oversee the whole activity. Do this in the library when no other class is using it or step outside the building and conduct it outdoors. Watch the fun that follows!



HOW A JOURNAL REVIEW WORKS

(Suitable for class 7 and above)

Each student selects or is helped to select a journal/periodical in the library to read and review. Each time two students can present, keeping the following points in mind. These points can be given to the class at the time of selection.

Name of magazine
Publisher
Place of publishing
Theme or focus of the magazine
Cost
Frequency
Visuals (Photographs, Illustrations etc)
Advertisements
Language
Style of the writing
Currency of news
Readership (age, level, interest etc)
Permanence
No. of pages
Critical appraisal
Value for money in the context of the school
Bias of the journal/article
Suggestions for increasing readership in school

REFERENCE GAMES

Learning how to search for, and find relevant information is a very vital part of library use. Before the students actually do reference work for a class project or assignment, we feel there is a need to introduce young children to reference materials through games and activities. At a young age there is a sense of wonder and fulfillment when they discover that when they want to know about something, someone or some place, they can actually find the information on their own by doing "reference work"!

So we begin to introduce young children from the age of 7 and above to different reference tools. The first thing we do is to make it a very ceremonious entry to the reference area! This is where, they are told, they can find correct information about almost everything. However, we also share with them that there may be questions for which we human beings do not have answers. We then go through a quick checklist of reference tools and in a discussion, establish what kind of information each source gives. For example, encyclopedias cover almost all areas of information, whereas dictionaries provide meanings of words, root meaning and source, pronunciation, along with a sentence to make the meaning clear. Dictionaries also carry information about tables, weights and measures, abbreviations, symbols. Atlases on the other hand give complete geographical facts, both physical and political, agricultural and meteorological.

Now this kind of knowledge must be tried and tested to become clear to the child. So we use the following games to help them discover and use the tools.

1. ENCYCLOPEDIAS

Each child, or in pairs or fours (depending on the size of your class) is asked to note down one piece of information they really want to know. After they have done this, the librarian shows how to choose the right level of encyclopedia and also how to access the material. At this point a discussion can take place about the way an encyclopedia is arranged, and why. Or they can write down their guesses. After they are all clear on how to find information in an encyclopedia, they are ready to start the game!

Send out groups of four or five with their queries, to search. If you can ensure that these are looking for different volumes, there will be less confusion. But if there is some confusion, don't worry. Children do learn in all kinds of ways! Once they have found it, tell them to note down the volume and page number. Repeat this process until all have had a turn. This is probably all one can do in one period. Collect the slips of paper.

In the next class you can assign the groups to locate their source. (The others can enjoy browsing through other reference books.) They then write three sentences in their own words about the item they were looking for. After that ask them to do a brief presentation to the whole class about the information they have found, and also to tell the others where they found it. The next time, you can rotate this process. A lot of unconscious learning is taking place even though a small group may actually do the searching.

2. ATLASES

Again the students are formed into pairs or fours, or alone depending on your class. Each unit is given an atlas. Then, ask them to select any place in the world they have heard about and would like to visit! After this they can be taught to go to the index, locate page number and co-ordinates. Then the fun begins when they do the 'finger' test. Left hand for latitude, right hand for longitude. Make the fingers meet and hey presto! Imagine their delight when they find the place. After this they can find out more information about the place itself. Help them to find it on a wall map, and then on a globe. Ask if they find any differences. The fun and discovery is endless.

3. DICTIONARIES

Here it would be best if each child has a pocket dictionary. Many children own one, and can be asked to bring it to school for this activity. The librarian calls out a word and the students must find the meaning, pronunciation, and have a sentence ready in their heads to be shared when asked. If your class has different levels of ability, give three different words, one for each level.

I have described the games only for the three basic tools but such games can be tried for other sources too. For older students of 10 and above, we have asked them to write down and bring their queries. One child had the question, "Why do we die"? This was an absorbing quest because it spanned books on biology, on philosophy and psychology as well! At the end, we had to agree that we don't have a final answer.

Another point is that one must repeat these exercises and games every one or two years until the students are well into projects. For older students, additional skills of reading and culling out relevant information are necessary. These can be done through simulation exercises of taking an assignment and going through the process of searching both in books and on the net, assessing the information for bias, currency and reliability, taking notes and converting the notes into a strong piece of writing. Of course this is best done by the English language teacher but the library and the librarian can support this skill building to great benefit.

PROJECTS INITIATED BY THE LIBRARY

Doing projects is an enjoyable and effortless way to get more closely acquainted and involved with the subject matter. Each year at least one term can be spent with each class where students take up projects in smaller groups, pairs, or even individually. The underlying theme of every project is to bring about ease and enhancement of library use.

Usually, we sit with the class for a brainstorming session at the beginning. Some ideas come from the children in the process of their own use of the library or they might arise out of observations of the library in general. The librarian too could suggest areas where there seem to be gaps in user friendliness!

The next is to chalk out a plan for action for each group, with inputs from them and guidance from the librarian. It is a good idea to work out what materials and other help they need. This is a possible time for the librarian to approach an art and craft teacher or a language teacher for some support depending on the theme. I have noticed that teachers do welcome a change from their routine and are open to this!

Laying down broad time deadlines facilitates the process. This helps the student to see that there will be completion when there is regular and planned work done.

When the project is done, it is presented to the rest of the school at an Assembly or to another class. This is done to ensure that there is exposure to a wider body and a confidence in presentation. The output is then displayed for a week in the library and is then absorbed into the use it was meant for.

Here are some examples of the projects done:

1. Creating books on themes like, "A day in the life of...", biographies of support staff working in the school, abridged versions of well known stories, history of the library, translations from English into Hindi and Kannada, and travelogues. These books follow the format of published books, which is a learning experience for the students.
2. Posters, either encouraging and extolling reading, or with simple rules and instructions to users.
3. Bibliographies of books under different categories. For example, stories from the past, stories from other lands, animal stories, myth and magic, and many others. These are attractively produced and are a great help to children when they come to borrow books. (This is another way in which the work of

the librarian is reduced and she is free to take on other activities in the library.)

4. Questionnaires to assess reading patterns and preference, along with the statistics.
5. Illustrations from story books where the reader uses her own imagination to depict a character or a scene.
6. Making a map of the entire library.
7. Making shelf guides and labels in a colorful and interesting format.
8. Creating dust jackets for books that need protection or have become worn out. This includes a cover design, an inside cover description of book and author, and a back cover with reviews and comments from actual readers at the school!
9. Loving and imaginative repair and care of old books. These are then displayed so that others might get inspired to do similar things!
10. Making a short film of the open library. This includes a writing assignment first where the students note down what their perception is of the library and list what they would like to visualize, and then write the script. The actual shooting can be done by the librarian or another teacher or even an older student.
11. Working on a piece of ground outside the library to create an outdoor reading space.
12. Preparing indexes of articles from the journals at school. This is better done by senior students with guidance from the librarian.
13. Writing a letter to a favourite author or illustrator. This can be done both to someone living or long dead! The idea is to express and establish a bond between the reader and the writer or illustrator.
14. Go through all the books in any one subject and take up repair, labelling, even weeding out. This has an enormous benefit because the children get to see, know about, and glance through books in one specific area. So does the librarian!!
15. Ask each student to pick six books of his or her choice, and write and stick a brief review inside the book.

These are only some of the ideas we have tried. There will be many others which you may have initiated in your library. The benefits are two-fold. In doing such a project, the students are taking a close look at all aspects of the library and are thinking actively about bringing about more ease. Secondly, all the projects they do are directly used by other children and teachers as well.

P.S. On a lighter note, since the library on our campus is open till late at night, a story began the rounds that there was a ghost in the library, in the science section! So, one class took on the project of "ghost-busting". These ghost-busters volunteered to sleep in the library at night, in pairs, and faithfully report any 'spirited' activity. The project was successfully completed and the library was declared ghost-free!



HOW TO BE A LIBRARIAN ON EQUAL TERMS WITH OTHER TEACHING STAFF

1. You do have a library period with all the classes, I hope. Ask for it and make sure it is YOUR period not an extension of a class or used for homework.
2. If you are not already on it, urge your management to have you on the selection committee for the library. You will then be able to give valuable suggestions for budget and purchase. This is your area of specialisation, you know!
3. Attend staff meetings. Share your observations of students in the library. This may give valuable information to teachers and heads.
4. Read some books on education and educational philosophy and practices. This will give you the foundation on which to base your library programme.
5. Do you write a library report like all the other teachers do for their subject? If not, start now. (See section on report of library use)
6. Prepare a library curriculum for students at each level, based on your own observations of the children in the library.
7. Note down patterns you see of their capabilities, interests and readiness.
8. Try to attend some talks by library professionals so that you keep up to date with current library movements and practice. Even if you don't use them in your library, you KNOW what is happening in the world of libraries and information..
9. Attend workshops and seminars like this one, and other related ones too, so that your school recognizes that librarianship is a vital discipline and has many, many possibilities.
10. If you have Assemblies in school, ask for one reading assembly a week, where each teacher reads out something of their choice taken from the school library. This way, different areas of the library are unearthed and different voices speak for the library.
11. Prepare, and get the students to prepare bibliographies on different topics or themes, both in fiction and non-fiction.
12. If your school has SUPW or an optional subject offer a mini course in Librarianship and tell the students how books are arranged, what is an ISBN no. and so on. Also get their help in the library.

13. Try and see if you can start a film viewing and appreciation group. This can be directly linked to books. Follow it up with some discussion on merits of books over film or vice versa.
14. Do a whole year's project with a specific subject teacher in History, Geography, Literature etc.

Last but most important, if you do not already have computer skills, get on to it fast. This will help you surf the net for information to help your users, and also push you into computerizing your collection. This is a must.

GOOD LUCK!!!



THE TEACHER AND THE LIBRARY: A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

The library is a responsive entity. With the best of collections, infrastructure and even services, it can spring to life only at the magic touch of the users. And in a school library the users are primarily the teachers, either directly, or indirectly, because through them, the students are initiated into becoming lifetime users.

Why is it so important that a school library be alive, vibrant, and continuously evolving?

It is the place to which fresh, young minds bring their curiosity and thirst for knowledge.

It is the place where the spirit of enquiry in teachers is met, sustained and strengthened.

It is the place where librarians face the exciting challenge of making the library a “happening” center.

Finally, it is the place that heads of institutions realize and recognize is the core of the educational process.

The inter-relationship between all these elements also creates an inter-dependence and no one aspect can grow without the warmth and sustenance of the others!

Here, my focus is on teachers but as you will see the implications for librarians and heads is inherent.

A natural way to bring meaning to our lives is to do something we believe in. Something we feel happy to do. In such a situation, we are learning and innovating constantly. There is no room for monotony or a sense of drudgery. Learning is essential to teaching. This is a statement I cannot over-emphasize. John Dewey's observation about the combined forces of reflection and action is significant here. As teachers you need to have, and to convey to students this reflective-learning stance. Changing circumstances, new developments, technological and psychological transformations that are taking place all around us demand that as teachers you have an intelligent response. This is necessary to tackle new issues that are thrown up each day that may even become obsolete by tomorrow! The nature of academic learning is also influenced by the availability of and use made of, new technologies.

As teachers and educators, can you see yourselves as opening a conversation when you begin a lesson? In order to carry on an interesting and rich conversation, and even to communicate clearly, you must have some resources to draw upon. It is impossible to draw on one's resources without replenishing them frequently.

So....Enter the library—your school library...other libraries—to restore and refurbish and refresh your store of abilities and knowledge.

Educators know from experience that it is necessary to understand an area of learning in order to teach it well, but that understanding on its own is not enough. So what else is needed? First, a deepening of knowledge in the specific content area of your subject. Second, a broadening of perspective. Connections and links, both local and global are made. How does this help the individual, the student and the institution? For the individual I would say there is tremendous potential for personal growth. Existing interests strengthen, new questions arise and the process of self-development is well on its way. There is not just the appearance, but also the fact of self-confidence. It does not need a psychologist to tell you what that means to your general sense of well being and harmony.

As for the institution – an innovative, confident and creative teacher is a valuable asset for every institution. She is a strong spokesperson for the place as well as being an individual in her own right. The really good teacher is one who can call her soul her own.

For the students, a teacher who is well-read, both in her own subject and outside it, provides a model and a source of inspiration. A teacher who has a strong base of reading, reference and research has an air of quiet authority and security. A young student at our school was particularly struck by the fact that Albert Einstein's teachers at his high school punished him when they could not answer his questions! The primary role of reading, researching and referencing is done by the teacher but gradually as the students begin to use the library more extensively, they take over the primary role and look to the teacher only for affirmation and confirmation. They are ready to be self-sufficient. However the teacher continues to be the motivator and the facilitator.

But – and I should have asked these questions first – Do you believe and trust that time spent in the library is time well spent? Do you have a positive attitude to the library? If the answer is YES, I go on to list a few more areas of self-development that the library can provide.

- ✿ Read to understand how what you are teaching fits into the overall curriculum. If, as a teacher, you are part of curriculum meetings, you need to be clear what the issues are.
- ✿ Read to enhance your teaching and communication methods – classroom management, current approaches and innovative techniques.
- ✿ Read to recognize and understand a particular child's difficulties – physical or psychological. Parenting and teaching are both highly demanding and creative responsibilities.

Even when a teacher has all this background, I am sure you see the necessity for ongoing updating.

How do you actualize this and begin?

1. The first step is to orient yourself to the library and the varied facets of the collection as well as the services provided. I always ask librarians to begin the school year with a “familiarizing and getting acquainted with the library” session. But if for any reason it does not happen, make the first move yourself. Next, you must constantly throw friendly challenges to the librarian. Access to material, availability, ease in searching and finding, quiet time for browsing, suggestions for the collection and arrangement, queries for reference....go ahead. No librarian worth her salt should object provided it is done in the right spirit. Talk with students to discover areas of special interest. Talk with the librarian to search for, highlight and make available relevant material.
2. Use a variety of media to teach. Take your students to the library to show them related material – videos, CD-ROMs, films, maps, audiotapes, archival material.....
3. Primary class teachers –Use poetry books to do Projects. Choose a story and get your class to write scripts and enact them. Use books on crafts, science experiments, clay work, maths puzzles to evoke individual responses in your students. For any fair or mela, get ideas in the library for motifs, decorations, artwork....the possibilities are endless.
4. For older classes, I have invited teachers to come in and do a book talk on a book they have read recently. Students are intrigued to see their subject teacher in a different garb. For the teachers too, it is an opportunity to bond with their students differently.. One idea that I had was for book talks to happen within a class in the specific subject areas. For example, a Maths teacher or a Biology teacher could recommend that some books which would deepen the interest of the student in the subject, be read and presented in a book talk. This is very different from a general book talk in the library where a larger audience attends. Here with a subject-oriented book talk, the teacher will find the possibility of a discussion taking place based on the book.
5. Teachers’ suggested readings both in Fiction and Non-Fiction are displayed or listed on the library board. Teachers, you can also alert students and even your colleagues regarding any interesting articles you have read in a periodical in the library.

6. Usually projects done by various classes are displayed in the library. If you as a teacher visit regularly, seeing these might trigger off ideas for you. Also if you see a student’s efforts in a different area, it would help you to view that student in a fresh light.
7. If you have any artefacts from a trip you have made, you can exhibit them in the library and talk about them, if possible. If you have some memoirs or old scrapbooks of archival interest, bring those in for a temporary display.
8. Use the newspapers and journals to do a unit on current events –bring about discussion and debate on terrorism, the war in Iraq, India – Pakistan relations, Gender issues...the list can go on. If you alert the librarian, she can look for relevant material of all kinds.
9. At our school and earlier where I worked, teachers always came along on book buying trips to stores, sales and book fairs. So there is an immediate co-relation between the selector and the user! Then too teachers have come in to help with weeding out and discarding books in their subject areas. This is a tremendous help for the librarian who does not have specific subject expertise.
10. Suggest visits to the outside – suggest visitors from outside – any interesting contacts you may have. All this enriches the library which in turn enriches you.
11. Teachers’ writings and participation in Seminars or Workshops must be shared on the library board. Some teachers have actually written books about their experiences and efforts, which naturally find a valued place in the library. When school excursions take place, the teacher and students maintain a diary. This too finds a place in the library for future travellers or even for informative reading.
12. Suggestions on aesthetics and ambience in the library will surely be welcomed by the librarian since it comes from a genuine interest and involvement from the teacher.
13. Remember, teachers, to take your students to the library for reference sessions. A change of scene will be refreshing, and work wonders on both you and the students!

You may now ask, how am I to do all this? Where is the time? This is where enlightened management comes in. In each teacher’s time-table, put in one period a week as a personal library period – not to be confused with bringing students in for a reference period. Believe me, this is not an imposition. After just one term, you will be looking forward to this period of quiet browsing, leisure and freedom

to pursue your interests. The management must recognize that this is a long-term investment and encourage this move.

As a librarian, may I list the following Don'ts for the teachers and the heads please?

DON'T send students to the library as a punishment for some failing.
DON'T send them there to complete their Home-work either. Both these give the wrong message.
DON'T use the library as a classroom (lecturing time) or a meeting room.
DON'T use the librarian as an office clerk or general dogsbody.
DON'T use the library collection as a showcase to impress visitors. If a library is doing what it is meant to do – it should be full of users and less full of books!

Till now I have not given any specific ideas or suggestions to librarians but I am confident that as you are listening, you are picking up the connections and links to your own place in this network. There are three categories of users that make us librarians who we are! They are the students, the teachers and the management. We need to embark on a relationship of trust, efficiency, dependability and friendliness with all three sets of users.

The students are the easiest to win over. They are young, open and eager to learn. Show them clearly by word and deed that you are there to help them, guide them regarding new technologies and make resources available.

- Make them feel welcome in the library.
- Invite them to help you. Take their suggestions for books and improvements in the library seriously.
- Photocopy material which they need. Volunteer to do this rather than as a big favour! If you see a great demand for some books, ask the management to let you buy one or two more copies, assuring them that there will be good use made.

Now for the teachers...as librarians we must MAKE them believe in the efficacy of the library. You can only do this by your actions and your services not just by word alone. You must convert them to become regular users and strong supporters of the library. Their presence in the library is the proof of this.

- First, invite them for an orientation to the library. Literally a guided tour. Show them your collection of maps; make them aware of the play scripts available. What about unusual books that may be tucked away and forgotten? Pull them out and show them. Newsletters and pamphlets from related institutions should be made available to them.

- If you know of the special interests of the teachers, be sure to alert them about any corresponding material. At the beginning of the year, get the teachers to fill in a form listing their needs and projecting their plan of topics for the term. The form could also ask for interests other than what they are teaching. Also ask them for suggestions. This puts the onus on them not us! Ask them for a commitment on what they would like to be involved with, i.e. any particular aspect.

You as the librarian are in a unique position to provide an alerting service to the teachers because you have a picture of the whole library. So without too much effort on their part, teachers can present a multi-dimensional approach to their teaching.

Now for the management or heads. Probably the greatest level of difficulty is to have a smooth but open and frank relationship with the management. Don't forget though that without their encouragement and support, you would probably not be here today, listening and participating. To win over the trust and confidence of the head is the most important task, because if that does not happen, many of the things I have said today become meaningless and just words. Be bold in word and deed. If you have and show clarity, energy and commitment, the head must listen. After all teachers and librarians are the ground on which the school stands or falls.

Now what of ourselves as librarians? What can we do to bring enrichment to our lives?

- Create a climate of confidence – not authority and arrogance.
- Put in the effort to be familiar with your own collection and resources. I often hear children tell each other – “Aunty has read all the books in the library!” Obviously not but I do create that impression because I have some idea about all the books. I watch and remember who has read the book, what they said about it, who gifted it or where it was bought...I remember the author, the illustrator, the publisher...enough to make the connection when I hear of something related next time.
- Wherever I go, I am always looking out for ideas that catch my eye.. As a teacher or a librarian, I can bring them back to my library and my classroom.

Librarians manage users and resources. Teachers manage students and subjects. So can you find a more dynamic information team than teachers and librarians?

»»REPORT ON USE OF THE LIBRARY««

1. Use of resources.
2. Use of place for quiet study.
3. Ability to search for and locate appropriate and necessary reference material.
4. Ability to do independent reference reading, culling out of information and taking notes.
5. General browsing and reading.
6. Selecting and reading fiction. Range and variety in this process.
7. Reading of magazines Range and scope.
8. Care in handling material.
9. Awareness and observation of displays and new material.
10. Sense of order and quietness in response to the place.
11. Involvement in keeping place neat and tidy.
12. Reaching out to help the library. Skills in this area.
13. Eagerness to come to the library and enjoyment of the place.
14. Responsiveness to the spirit of an open library